

Problem gaming in an everyday perspective

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ABSTRACT

In this panel we take a critical look at problem gaming. We question existing approaches that tend to draw on concepts from clinical psychology and we introduce everyday life and the general wellbeing of youth as an alternative perspective.

Keywords

Video game addiction, problem gaming, children and youth, everyday life

INTRODUCTION

The concept of "video game addiction" has gradually replaced the depiction of violence in video games as a key issue of concern among parents and professionals. The concept refers to situations where (predominantly) young (predominantly) men neglect other activities in their everyday lives in order to play video games. As follows from the term "addiction" the public common sense as well as a considerable part of research draw

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heavy parallels to alcohol abuse or psychological disorders applying either a neurophysiological or a clinical psychological approach to the issue (e.g. Gentile 2009). Typical to these approaches is the idea that the game is a direct cause to the problems and that possible pathological patterns can be derived directly from specific gameplay patterns irrespectively of context. In parallel to this widely held belief, however, a substream of studies has taken a more sociological and contextual approach focusing on the social context of the gamers in question (e.g. Linderöth & Bennerstedt 2007). This panel will continue in a similar vein. The aim is not to deny that a phenomenon such as problem gaming may exist, but rather to question whether the term addiction as imported from neurophysiology or clinical psychology does sufficiently describe it. Accordingly, the aim is to redefine the concept theoretically and empirically and to question simple causal relationship such as the direct link between gameplay patterns and addiction. The panel will introduce everyday life, family and youth as alternative perspectives on problem gaming and the individual presentations in the panel will take a range of perspectives on this issue:

Rune Kristian Lundedal Nielsen will initiate the panel with a critical discussion of existing measures of video game addiction. Nielsen will track the historical roots of the diagnostic criteria of video game addiction from Fisher's (1994) DSM-IV-JV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV-Juvenile Arcade Video Game) to the American Psychiatric Association's (2013) Internet Gaming Disorder. The abstract components of the concept of video game addiction are traced over time and related to the individual items of current measures. Through a review and comparison the validity of current measures are questioned as the individual criteria are discussed in terms of how they are translated into specific questions that are instantiated in current measures such as Gentile (2009), Lemmens, Valkenburg and Peter (2009), and Pontes, Király, Demetrovics, & Griffiths (2014). The analysis defines three critical steps of translation and asks what, if anything, has been lost in the process.

Following up on this, Anne Mette Thorhauge and Andreas Gregersen will present findings from a questionnaire survey using an alternative type of measure, that is, self-reports on media habits and the general wellbeing of players and non-players. Our dataset combines survey responses from a stratified random sample of Danish 10-18 year olds (n= 1560) with socio-demographic background variables. This dataset and the resulting analyses of game playing behaviour are, to our knowledge, the first of their kind. The presentation will discuss whether and to what degree respondents with specific gameplay patterns differ from the general population with regard to their well-being: Among the findings presented will be a significant association between family conflict and particular types of games which will lead up to the two following presentations.

Jessica Enevold's presentation takes a family and parental mediation perspective on problem gaming. The lack of young Swedish gamers' perspective on everyday playing practices has to some extent been remedied by Linderöth and Bennerstedt (2007) and Linderöth and Olsson (2010), but a parental perspective is still largely missing in the research. Between every active, and at times problematically active, gamer in Sweden, stand a number of, often worried and concerned, parents. This presentation inventories some of the fundamental problems parents of game/screen "addicted" children grapple with. It focuses on families in which children's gaming is so problematic that parents have sought professional help, and illustrates how these parents find themselves in a predicament: their child's excessive gaming dominates their everyday life, in terms of their trying to manage their child's absence from school, loss of off-line friends and

disturbed sleeping patterns. But their aims to reduce their children's' IT use also conflict with governmental and educational policies and aims to increase students' and citizens' digital media use.

Finally, Faltin Karlsen will question whether game design can be said to have any importance at all. MMORPG is the game genre that has received most attention from psychological research on problem gaming (Kuss and Griffiths 2011). One reason for this is that players of online games on average spend considerable more time on playing than players of other genres (Williams et al. 2008). The reward schedules that are characteristic of this genre are often employed to explain excessive use. Karlsen argues that the social aspects of MMORPGs may offer a better explanation as to why players play excessively. While the never-ending nature of this genre in large explains the long-term dedication of players, the social life within the game explains why especially time-demanding gaming practices, like raiding, have gained popularity. The focus on structure, and the general aim to develop universal criteria for "online game addiction" are also at odds with the fact that gaming practices are in a constant flux.

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